



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Kern National Wildlife Refuge Complex

Planning Update 2, March 2000

Greetings!

This is the second update from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) intended to keep you informed about our planning process for the Kern National Wildlife Refuge Complex.

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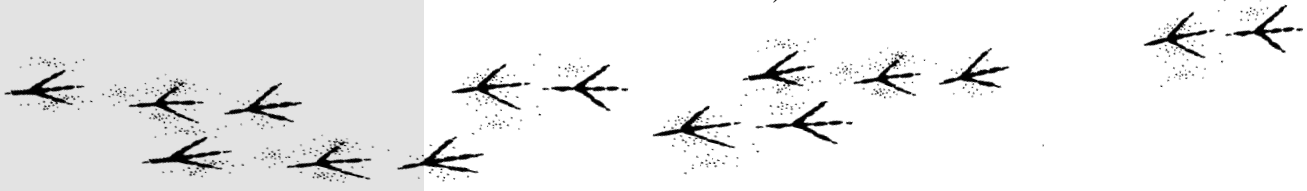


Wetlands at Kern NWR, USFWS

THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING!

We would like to thank everyone who has sent us comments and ideas on the Kern National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge) Complex. Approximately 20 people attended two public workshops held in August 1999 at Tulare and Bakersfield. In addition, we have received numerous comments by mail and email.

This update summarizes the issues and concerns we have heard to date and describes our progress in developing a comprehensive conservation plan (CCP) for the Kern Refuge Complex. Planning Update 1 described the planning process, opportunities for public input, and interim refuge goals. If you would like a copy of Planning Update 1, please contact David Hardt, the Kern Refuge Complex project leader, or Mark Pelz, the CCP planning team leader (see page 5 for contact information).





*Great blue heron,
Jean Harrison, USFWS*

The Planning Process

- ☒ Identify Public and Agency Issues
- ☒ Gather Data
- ☐ Develop Goals and Objectives
- ☐ Develop Management Strategies
- ☐ Evaluate Environmental Impacts
- ☐ Prepare Draft CCP/EA
- ☐ Public Review of Draft EA
- ☐ Public Notice of Decision

PUBLIC IDENTIFIES ISSUES AND CONCERNS

We have have received a number of comments on the refuges through a variety of different sources: (1) public workshops held in Tulare and Bakersfield, (2) letters received by mail and delivered in person to the Kern Refuge Headquarters, and (3) email. These comments, along with issues identified by the planning team will help us decide what issues need to be addressed in the CCP. Below is a sampling of the comments we have received.

General

In general commenters supported the refuges and approved of the way they are being managed by the current staff. Three people recommended that the CCP be coordinated with other conservation efforts in the region. One commenter suggested that Kern Refuge should be kept in its current condition. Another commenter stated that current water allocations should be maintained or increased if possible.

Wildlife and Habitat Management

We received a variety of comments relating to wildlife management. A few people commented on management for specific species. For example, one commenter suggested that the Service replace chain link fencing with larger mesh to avoid a possible choking hazard to kit foxes. Another person suggested that Kern Refuge should emphasize management of tricolor blackbirds.

Several people commented on existing management practices at the refuges. Three commenters suggested that cattle grazing should continue to be used as a management tool on the refuges. Four people suggested that vegetation in Unit 1 should be better controlled to provide more open water habitat. Another person commented that the refuge should ensure that vegetation management practices in the marsh are sensitive to migratory birds which use vegetation in the spring and summer.

Other commenters suggested the refuges could adopt new wildlife management measures, including reintroducing large native game, or offering incentives to adjacent landowners to grow wildlife-friendly crops. Finally, one person suggested that the status and distribution information for all the natural resources on the refuge should be updated.

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OUR VISION FOR THE REFUGES

The planning team has developed the following draft vision statements for Kern and Pixley Refuges. We developed these vision statements by trying to visualize what the refuges will look like in the future, given the refuge purposes, other management authorities, principles of wildlife management, and public input.

Kern NWR: *Kern National Wildlife Refuge is representative of a once extensive complex of native wetlands and uplands and currently is the largest wetland complex managed for wildlife in the southern San Joaquin Valley. With a secure water supply, Kern Refuge will provide reliable, high-quality wetland habitat to meet the needs of wintering and migrating waterfowl and waterbirds. The Refuge's riparian corridors and seasonal wetlands will support a rich diversity of migratory songbirds, colonial nesting species, and raptors. Remnant valley-floor uplands will be preserved and restored for native plant and animal species. These uplands will support populations of threatened and endangered species including blunt-nosed leopard lizard, Tipton kangaroo rat, and San Joaquin kit fox. In order to meet the demands of the rapidly growing population of the Southern San Joaquin Valley and to accommodate more than 50,000 visitors annually, the Refuge will provide opportunities for high-quality wildlife-dependant public use, including environmental education, interpretation, and compatible recreation. These public use opportunities will increase the public's understanding of and appreciation for wildlife and the importance of conserving their habitat.*

Pixley NWR: *Pixley National Wildlife Refuge represents one of the few remaining examples of the grasslands, vernal pools, and playas that once bordered the historic Tulare Lake. Management of these diverse natural communities will focus on providing high-quality habitat for threatened and endangered species including Tipton kangaroo rat, blunt-nosed leopard lizard, San Joaquin kit fox, and vernal pool fairy shrimp. Natural lands between Kern and Pixley NWRs will be protected through conservation easements, partnerships, and willing seller acquisition to provide linkage areas for these species. Managed wetlands and adjacent grasslands will provide high-quality habitat for wintering and migratory waterfowl and waterbirds, including sandhill cranes. Restored riparian corridors will support a rich diversity of migratory songbirds and raptors. Pixley Refuge will provide unique opportunities for compatible wildlife-dependant public use which will increase the public's understanding of and appreciation for wildlife and the importance of conserving their habitat.*

Issues: Continued from page 2

Public Use

We received more comments on public use than any other category. These comments fall into three main categories: facilities and staffing, hunting, and non-consumptive recreation. Under the first category (facilities and staffing), commenters suggested that the number of bathrooms at Kern Refuge be increased, and that Service staff be on site at all times to prevent vandalism. Other commenters suggested that more parking lots be opened at Kern Refuge and that a parking lot be constructed for visitors to Pixley Refuge.

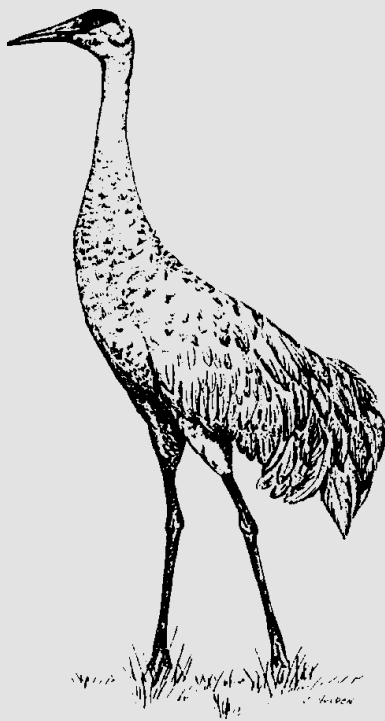
Comments on hunting were varied. Several commenters expressed support for the hunting program at Kern Refuge. Another commenter stated that hunting and trapping are not compatible with refuge purposes. Two people requested that more youth hunt days be planned.

Several people commented on the areas open to hunting at Kern Refuge. Comments ranged from requests to increase the area open to hunting at Kern Refuge to closing particular units. Other commenters suggested rotating the open and closed units. One person requested that Pixley Refuge be opened to hunting.

Several people commented on the reservation system. Some comments supported the existing system while others were opposed to it and suggested changes. One person suggested that the refuge offer three types of hunting passes: hunting from blinds, free roaming, and hunting from dikes. Four commenters requested that more hunters be accommodated on hunt days.

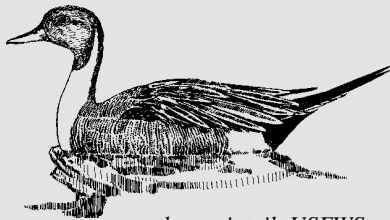
A number of people suggested changes in hunting regulations. Two commenters requested that the Service allow hunting on Sundays. One person suggested that hunters be allowed to start 1/2 to 1 hour earlier. Another person requested that the current 25-shell limit be maintained and that enforcement be increased. One commenter suggested that motion decoys be prohibited. Another person recommended that the Fish and Wildlife Service adopt a two adult hunter per blind limit.

We received a variety of comments and ideas on non-consumptive recreation. One person suggested that a birder's board be established outside the new office where birders can record their sightings. Two



Sandhill crane, USFWS

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northern pintail, USFWS

WHO DO I CONTACT?

If you would like more information about the refuge or this planning process, or would like to comment on the draft vision statements, please feel free to call, email, or write us:

For information about the refuges:

David Hardt, Project Leader
Kern National Wildlife Refuge Complex
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For information about the CCP:

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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
2800 Cottage Way, Room W-1916
Sacramento, CA 95825
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commenters suggested that the Service establish a second tour route at Kern Refuge that can be used on hunt days. Several comments addressed Pixley Refuge specifically. One commenter requested that a signed nature trail and viewing platform be developed at Pixley Refuge. Another person said the service should address the liability issues of concurrent use by the public of areas where permittee livestock may interact with public uses such as birdwatching.

Outreach / Environmental Education

One commenter suggested that the Service produce an educational video about the refuge and make a concerted effort to involve area schools. The same commenter suggested that the Service conduct a publicity campaign highlighting refuge restoration efforts and the resulting benefits. Finally, another person suggested that the Service put a Watchable Wildlife sign on Highway 99 to direct visitors to Pixley Refuge.

Acquisition

A number of commenters suggested that the Service expand Kern and Pixley Refuges to provide protected corridors between the refuges and other conservation areas on the valley floor. Another person suggested that the Service acquire lands at boundaries of Kern Refuge to secure feeding habitat for tricolor blackbirds. Finally, another commenter recommended that the Service acquire the remaining private lands within the Pixley Refuge approved boundary.

WHAT'S NEXT

Our next task is to develop alternative sets of objectives and strategies for managing the Kern Refuge Complex. These objectives and strategies will be based on the purposes and goals of each refuge as well as the issues identified through public comments and internal scoping. We will keep you informed of our progress in later planning updates.



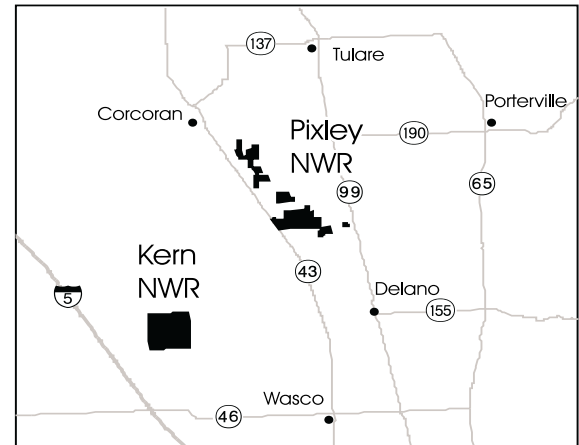


Kern Refuge Complex Update



The Kern National Wildlife Refuge Complex is still holding many wintering waterfowl with northern shoveler, northern pintail, green-winged teal, and cinnamon teal being some of the most numerous species. Diving ducks such as canvasbacks, redheads, and ring-neckeds can also be seen. Nearly 4,000 sandhill cranes have been seen wintering at Pixley Refuge. Winter is also a good time of year to observe many raptors wintering on the refuges. Red-tailed hawks are common as well as northern harriers, Cooper's hawks, and sharp-shinned hawks. The regular waterfowl season ended on Kern National Wildlife Refuge on January 22, 2000. The Refuge's third annual Youth Waterfowl Hunting Day was held on January 29, 2000.

Blue Ridge National Wildlife Refuge was recently transferred from the Kern Refuge Complex to the Hopper Mountain Refuge Complex. The purpose of the transfer was to consolidate all the refuges managed for the California condor into one complex. As a result of this transfer, Blue Ridge Refuge will no longer be covered by the Comprehensive Conservation Plan being prepared for the Kern Refuge Complex. If you have questions about the Blue Ridge Refuge, please contact Marc Weitzel, Project Leader, Hopper Mountain Refuge Complex at (805) 644-5185.



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

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Address correction requested